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Identical letters dated 29 August 2017 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I should like to convey to you the position of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the forty-second report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/733).

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates the concerns that it raised in its previous responses to reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the aforementioned Security Council resolutions. The Government asks that it be provided with the monthly report in sufficiently advance of the date on which the Security Council will discuss the report, so as to enable it to state its opinion thereon in a timely manner.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its request that the authors of the report take a more factual and objective approach to the humanitarian situation in Syria, especially since the report continues to ignore the most important factors that have caused the living standards and humanitarian situation of the Syrian people to decline. Following are some of the most significant of those factors:

- Terrorism and the actions of armed terrorist groups hinder, in various ways, the delivery of assistance to beneficiaries.
- The European Union, the United States of America and other States continue to impose unilateral, coercive and illegal measures against Syria. Those measures, which violate international law, the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Organization, have severely hampered the development of the Syrian people and caused serious harm to their sources of livelihood, and they have obstructed humanitarian operations and logistical operations related thereto.
- The regimes and Governments of certain well-known States continue to interfere in Syrian affairs and to support extremism and terrorism, prolonging the crisis and hindering efforts to resolve it through a Syrian-led political process.
- Scant funding from donors, who have, to date, provided only 30 per cent of the funds needed for the 2017 humanitarian response plan.

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- Targeting by the air force of the so-called international coalition of civilian objects, infrastructure and service facilities, including hospitals, schools, power stations, oil and gas wells and their facilities, dams and bridges.

- The authors continue to take an illogical and unprofessional approach. They are diverting the attention of Member States from the principal reasons for the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria and are creating pretexts that serve the goal of certain influential Western States to distort the image of the Syrian Government.

- Regrettably, the authors of the report rely on dubious and politicized sources, and ignore, for the most part, the information provided by the representatives of the United Nations who are present in the field. The following have been acknowledged by representatives of the United Nations in Syria but deliberately ignored by the authors of the report.

- Hundreds of Syrian civilians, mostly women and children, have been killed in Raqqah as a result of the air strikes carried out by the "international coalition" and its allied forces and as a result of the coalition's bombardment of civilian-populated residential neighbourhoods.

- High rates of recruitment of children to the ranks of the armed terrorist groups and forces supported by the "international coalition".

- The selective provision of assistance, medical treatment and shelter by armed groups to specific groups on the basis of ethnicity or other discriminatory grounds.

- Pressure from some international actors to ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered to certain areas, but not to others.

- Recognition of the catastrophic effects that European-American economic measures have on the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and the operational capacity of the projects and activities of the United Nations and its partners in Syria.

- Deterioration of the humanitarian situation of Syrian civilians as a result of the failure of international donors to provide pledged funds, including funds that had been pledged by certain States and donors to international organizations for the repair of totally or partially destroyed hospitals.

- The armed terrorist groups, in their areas of deployment, exploit and extort civilians who wish to leave for areas controlled by the Syrian State, so that they may receive necessary medical treatment.

- The humanitarian situation and living conditions of civilians have improved in the areas that have been liberated from the armed terrorist groups by Syrian Government forces, as is the case in Aleppo, Wa'r and elsewhere.

While the authors of the report acknowledge that the Government "continued to provide basic services both in areas under its control and in many beyond its control", they fail to acknowledge that it was the counter-terrorism efforts of the Syrian State and its forces that facilitated humanitarian access. Moreover, the authors ignore the facilitation of the Syrian State and its institutions and the great efforts that they have been making to assist international organizations engaged in humanitarian and aid work in the Syrian Arab Republic. Instead, the authors continue to pursue their systematic policy of making accusations.

The Syrian Government stresses that it alone is authorized to ensure the safety and security of Syrians and to protect them. It has a constitutional duty under national legislation and international law to fight the terrorism of Islamic State in

Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front and associated entities and terrorist individuals with numerous names and allegiances. Countering terrorism is essential to restoring security and stability, increasing the amount of assistance delivered and improving the humanitarian situation and living conditions of Syrians. The Syrian Government reiterates that in the course of carrying out its counter-terrorism efforts, it has complied fully with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law, particularly with regard to ensuring the security and safety of civilians and civilian facilities and objects, such as hospitals and schools.

The Syrian Government reiterates its commitment to the cessation of hostilities agreement that entered into force on 30 December 2016 and the agreements concerning the "de-escalation areas", as those agreements contribute to the success of the Government's strategy to counter-terrorism, deliver humanitarian assistance to beneficiaries and achieve national reconciliation.

The Syrian Government expresses its reservation with regard to the holding of any meetings or consultations called by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria in the context of the so-called Civil Society Support Room without prior coordination with the Syrian Government.

It is regrettable that the authors of the report make excessive use of the term "besieged areas" and cite inaccurate figures in that regard in order to accuse the Syrian Government and mollify Western States. It would have been more useful if the authors of the report had used that term to denote the areas besieged from within and without by the armed terrorist groups. Syrian forces, like any regular forces, apply the constitution, preserve security and stability, and fight terrorism.

The Syrian Government reiterates its principled position on the centrality and importance of national reconciliation agreements in ending the suffering of civilians in various parts of Syria who have been used as human shields for years by armed terrorist groups. Such agreements have also contributed substantially to the reconstruction and improvement of service facilities. Moreover, those agreements have protected the rights of the neighbourhoods' residents, civilians and armed individuals alike, who were given the choice of remaining in their neighbourhoods or heading for other areas.

The Syrian Government reminds the authors that the report under consideration is a United Nations report, and it is therefore unacceptable to continue to deliberately ignore the brutal massacres of civilians committed by "international coalition" aircraft. The attacks that have been carried out by those aircraft have killed and injured thousands of persons, most of them women and children, and caused serious damage to Syrian infrastructure. The authors' deliberate disregard of the crimes of the "international coalition" is in keeping with the desire of some of them to please Western States and cover up the crimes committed by those States' international coalition. That coalition was established without a request from the Syrian Government and without Security Council authorization, therefore making it unaccountable.

The Syrian Government reiterates that it rejects the authors' use of non-legal terminology. For instance, they refer to armed terrorist groups as "non-State armed opposition". In so doing, they are distorting reality and violating United Nations resolutions concerning counter-terrorism. Syria also finds it deplorable that the authors of the report have taken it upon themselves to classify groups that are active in Syria as "terrorist" groups or "opposition" groups, although they know that those groups, whatever they are called, receive arms, funding and support from the same sources (particularly Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey). Those groups espouse an extremist ideology that is based on rejection of the other, extremism, branding others as infidels, killing, exploitation of women and recruitment of child soldiers.

Those groups also coordinate closely when carrying out terrorist operations against Syrian civilians.

The Government finds it regrettable that the Secretariat fails to mention in its report the acts of aggression being committed by the Turkish regime and attempts to legitimize the actions of that regime and its allies in Syria, although those actions constitute a blatant attack against the sovereignty and territorial unity and integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, are a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and serve to support terrorism and prolong the crisis. The presence of Turkish troops in Syrian territory is in effect the occupation of an independent and sovereign country's territory. The Security Council must put an end to this occupation immediately if it is genuinely committed to upholding the Charter and international law.

The Syrian Government reiterates that it has approved most of the requests that the World Health Organization (WHO) has made to send assistance to various areas of Syria, whether in response to individual requests by WHO or in the context of inter-agency convoys. Contrary to the claims contained in box 3 of the report, the Syrian Government points out that it regularly approves the importation of medical supplies with inter-agency convoys, as well as requests submitted by United Nations organizations operating in Syria. The Syrian Government is committed to providing medical care for citizens without discrimination, and it has facilitated the transfer of patients from volatile areas to Government hospitals so that they may receive the necessary treatment. It should be noted that medical assistance is distributed in accordance with the number of people in need and with safety considerations.

The Syrian Government stresses that figures provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on humanitarian assistance convoys are incorrect. Since the start of 2017, over 65 humanitarian assistance convoys have been dispatched, and in the month of July, convoys were dispatched to the following areas: Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham (8 July), Hulah (15 July), Harbinafsah (15 July), Dar al-Kabirah, Ghantu and Tayr Ma'lah (22 July), Duma and nearby towns (22 July), Darkhabiyah and Zakiyah (29 July), and Nashabiyah and nearby towns (30 July). As of 3 August 2017, 437,320 families had received assistance.

The delay in dispatching certain convoys has been caused by the security situation in target areas and by the actions of armed terrorist groups and the fighting that has been going on among them. The terrorist groups have prevented convoys from entering, not allowed mines to be removed from the road and failed to agree on crossings. The convoys have been prevented from moving in order to ensure the safety and security of their personnel.

The Syrian Government stresses that the authors of the report and United Nations agencies operating in Syria must address the question of delivery of humanitarian assistance in a precise and unbiased manner. We note that certain United Nations agencies are exaggerating needs in certain areas and requesting delivery of vast quantities of aid that are greatly out of line with the number of beneficiaries and their needs. Meanwhile, those same agencies deliver little or no assistance at all to other areas. Such conduct has, in several cases, led to waste of effort and funds, and allowed the goods being delivered to spoil and exceed their expiration date.

The Government reiterates that the United Nations must fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and should not pay heed or bow to the demands of other actors, such as the "local authorities" that the authors mention. The Organization must also not take any measures that could under any circumstances be interpreted as recognition of or legitimizing such actors.

The Syrian Government is surprised that the Secretariat has once again failed to mention the catastrophic economic, social, humanitarian, and medical suffering borne by the Syrian people as a result of the ongoing unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by the United States of America, the European Union and other States against such sectors as health, electricity, energy, trade, finance and transfer of funds, which are vital to the survival of the Syrian people and relief operations. The Government stresses that by continuing to deliberately ignore this fundamental issue, and the issue of "international coalition" crimes in Syria, the authors of the report will have to bear the moral and legal responsibility of their complicity with those States that violate the Charter of the United Nations and the Organization's relevant resolutions by imposing the above-mentioned measures.

The Government is surprised that the authors continue to include incorrect information in the reports. It therefore reaffirms that it has granted approval for 27 international non-governmental organizations (not 22, as stated in the report) to carry out humanitarian and relief work in Syria. Those organizations are given the assistance they need to carry out their work in accordance with the legislation and regulations in force in the Syrian Arab Republic. It further notes that during the month of July, it approved 48 applications for entry visas to Syria for United Nations staff and 92 requests for renewal of visas (not 53, as stated in the report). We defy the authors of the report to prove their claims. The Syrian Government has also granted hundreds of entry visas to employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The Syrian Government rejects the Secretariat's continued promotion of cross-border assistance, and reiterates that such assistance is ineffective, given that most of it falls into the hands of armed terrorist groups deployed in the targeted areas. The notifications sent to the Syrian Government do not meet the minimum standard of credibility with regard to figures, data, number of beneficiaries and information on the parties that receive and distribute assistance to civilian beneficiaries.

The Syrian Government reiterates that the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic cannot carry out its duty, as it has not been able to verify to date that this cross-border assistance is reaching its rightful beneficiaries. We remind you that the Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salamah and Ramtha crossings are also entry points for arms and materiel being smuggled to armed terrorist groups in Syria. The Government strongly rejects the authors' continued bias in favour of Turkey and Jordan when discussing the delivery of cross-border assistance. The Syrian Government reiterates that the Syrian Arab Red Crescent stands ready to monitor the delivery of humanitarian assistance to its intended recipients, but the Secretariat has in the past rejected that proposal.

The Syrian Government reiterates its stated position regarding the International Criminal Court and the calls that have been made to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to that Court, and stresses that the Court is not competent to address the situation in Syria. Moreover, the Court has lost all credibility and has been transformed into a political tool that is used by certain parties to attack specific States for sordid political ends that have nothing to do with the requirements of justice. The Syrian Government also reiterates what it stated in its letter addressed to the Secretary-General (A/71/799) regarding the serious legal flaws in General Assembly resolution 71/248 concerning the establishment of an International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

The Syrian Government regrets that the report does not call for action that would help to improve the situation in Syria, in particular the humanitarian situation. The Secretariat should frankly and clearly call on the regimes of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and other countries to refrain from supporting terrorism in Syria, frankly call on the European Union, the United States of America and other States to lift the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed on Syria and call for those regimes that support terrorism and seek to undermine the foundations of a political solution, prolong the crisis and drain Syria to be held accountable for their actions.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its long-standing position that the crisis in Syria requires a political solution based on intra-Syrian dialogue under Syrian leadership without foreign intervention and without preconditions. We remind the Secretariat that the success of the political process and any significant improvement in the humanitarian situation will depend, above all, on creating a climate conducive to a serious and non-politicized international and regional commitment to fighting terrorism and on an immediate end to the unilateral coercive economic measures being imposed on the Syrian people. The Syrian Government has played a constructive role in the success of the Astana and Geneva meetings.

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic once again calls on the Security Council to prevail on the States that support and finance armed terrorist groups to refrain from so doing, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism and the financing thereof, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2253 (2015). Compliance with and enforcement of those resolutions is the key to resolving the situation in Syria and delivering unprecedented humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mounzer **Mounzer**
Minister Counsellor
Chargé d'affaires a.i.